

"To promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which inhere in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the local church; to provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.*"

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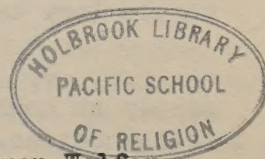
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LAND AND HUMAN WELFARE*

By J. M. Ormond, *et al.*



Introduction: As we gather here to discuss Land and Human Welfare millions of people in many countries are desperately hungry. While hate-directed bombs and bullets destroy millions of young men who are in armed service, starvation is waging a war equally ruthless and extensive among non-combatant men, women and children in the war-torn countries.

When Jesus saw multitudes in need of food he said to His disciples, "Give ye them to eat." The Christian Church can do no less today for the much larger multitudes in many countries who will die unless help is extended. The urgency of feeding the world now and in those long, hard days of reconstruction after the war brings to the Christian conscience the necessity of considering the land and its possibilities for ministering to human welfare.

Although the immediate problem before us is to feed the millions who are hungry because of this war, we are called upon to state the Christian ethic in regard to the total problem of land and human welfare, for today and for the long future, for the producers who live on land and for the large number of consumers who are dependent upon the products of the land.

In its effort to express the Christian ethic the Church will be governed by certain basic principles, which are derived from the life and teachings of Jesus:

A. That God created the earth for the sacred purpose of nurturing the human family. Whenever an individual, a corporation, or a government acquires and controls large areas of land and natural resources for economic or political power at the expense of others it is a flagrant violation of this Christian principle.

*This is the report of a Seminar dealing with "The Land and Human Welfare" presented at a Conference on Christian Bases of World Order held at Delaware, Ohio, March 8-12, 1943, authorized by the Division of Foreign Missions of the Methodist Board of Missions and directed by R. E. Diffendorfer, its Executive Secretary. The Conference was held in connection with the Merrick Lectures of Ohio Wesleyan University. The leader of the Seminar was Professor J. M. Ormond, The Divinity School, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. The members of the Seminar were: O. E. Baker, Newell S. Booth, Mr. and Mrs. D. S. Coltrane, J. Merle Davis, T. S. Donohugh, Wade Goldston, C. Horace Hamilton, Mrs. E. L. Hillman, C. E. Hix, Jr., Mabel K. Howell, Charles S. Johnson, B. Y. Landis, Elizabeth M. Lee, George Orser, John H. Reisner, J. E. Shepard, Garland Stafford, Edgar T. Thompson and A. J. Walton.

B. That man is morally responsible for the conservation and proper use of the land for the sake of present and future generations. That human beings have failed to recognize the stewardship of land has been brought to our attention in many ways and in many areas. Occasional disastrous floods, sand storms, and vast acres of eroded and exploited land rise up to condemn us.

C. That the fruits of the earth be produced and distributed with respect to the need of all people. There is land enough to meet all material needs of all the peoples of the earth. If producers or distributors allow their desire for exorbitant profits to stand in the way of feeding hungry people they have done violence to this Christian principle.

D. The land is never to be used to degrade human personality but to supply an abundant material medium through which man may attain his highest satisfactions. One of the well recognized teachings of Jesus is that human personality is of far more value than all material resources. Land under the ownership of an individual or a government, therefore, should be made to yield the full measure of material benefits to help human consumers attain their best in spiritual satisfactions.

I. Upon the basis of such principles the Church should teach and encourage the development of policies and actions in the following areas:

A. The Preservation of Human and Cultural Values in Rural Life

Long before the present war the human and cultural values of rural life were being undermined by the rapid growth of materialistic philosophies and economies. The materialistic philosophy implies that man's greatest need is for physical comfort and pleasure and that this need can be satisfied by constantly increasing the consumption of material goods. In man's struggle to achieve higher material levels of living he has lost some of the most precious human and cultural values of the older agrarian civilization.

Under the domination of modern materialism, agriculture, instead of being a "way of life," tends to become a means of making money. The independent farmer loses the security that lay in land ownership and production for home use. The ownership of land passes from the hands of small farm proprietors into the hands of absentee landlords, large scale operators and speculators. Specialization, bigness and efficiency become the dominating values. "One crop" agricultural economies develop.

Factory farming replaces family farming. Power machinery replaces human workers. Family labor is replaced by migratory hired workers. Under the impact of these technological and social changes the rural church and the rural school are weakened and often destroyed; and both national and international relations become complicated.

Our task is therefore a two-fold one: (1) preserving the human and cultural values in civilizations which still survive; and (2) building and strengthening those social institutions and human relationships which in the new world order will protect and nurture the human and cultural values. A civilization that ignores these fundamental issues cannot and, indeed, should not survive.

B. Utilization and Conservation of Natural Resources

The protection and conservation of the resources of the land have

to the community need to be recognized, such as: (1) the emphasis on the rights of the groups as against excessive attention to the rights of the individual; (2) social cohesion with status and responsibilities for each member; (3) the importance of marriage as a social act and not merely something of private concern.

Potential dangers in the community to the rural family need to be stressed, such as: (1) smothering the individual and personal right of freedom of expression and of religion; (2) the inertia of binding conservatism and traditionalism; (3) insoluble problems of inheritance; (4) disregard for all outside the clan or family.

The significance of cooperatives to community well-being is coming to be more widely appreciated. The history of cooperatives in Denmark, Ireland and elsewhere shows how readily and easily the principle of cooperation generates and quickens educational, literary and spiritual movements. The Christian Church cannot afford to ignore the tremendous latent powers for good inherent in the cooperative movement.

F. Population and Migration

Birth rates in rural areas of western countries are usually higher than needed to maintain the population, but in urban areas just the reverse is true. The birth rate in most of the highly urbanized countries is insufficient to maintain the total population. The constant migration of rural youth to cities, forced by differences in rural and urban birth rates, is an important source of social waste and maladjustment. The differential birth rate in both rural and urban areas is apparently dysgenic.

Effective policies are dangerously slow in developing. Unless action on these fundamental problems is taken soon, it will be too late. The extension of social security programs with benefits in kind for children would help stimulate urban birth rates and protect the health and welfare of all children. Decentralization of cities and industries, expanded public housing programs, and the development of well planned suburban greenbelts would help to increase urban birth rates.

Rural populations are not well distributed in proportion to agricultural resources. Many poor land areas, suitable for self-sufficing agriculture, are overpopulated; and rich commercial farming areas are underpopulated. Wholesale movements of rural people, for whatever reason, should be undertaken only as a last resort and even then should be carried out as gradually as possible with due regard to the human cultural values involved.

Since rural areas produce a relatively large proportion of the children and youth; and since wealth is concentrated in the urban areas where birth rates are low, equitable funds for education, health, and other essential social services should be provided.

G. International Organization for Research and Planning in Rural Life

After the war it is expected that many of the research and educational functions of the League of Nations will be continued if not considerably expanded. Whatever form the new international organization takes, it is proposed here that it include an agency for research and planning in rural life. This agency should be responsible for stimulating and coordinating research and planning activities on a world-wide basis. It would study particularly the problems involved in post-war rural reconstruction as well as the impact of international programs upon

er. Dr. Braatoy showed how this has been done in Sweden. The food stamp plan, developed under the leadership of Vice-President Wallace when he was Secretary of Agriculture, has helped to bring labor and the farmer together in America. These developments are in the best Christian tradition and should be encouraged possibly on a world-wide scale.

D. Land Tenure and Security

There is no one land tenure system which will give maximum human welfare and security to all men, but there are certain basic principles in all cultures, whatever be the details of the system, which must be recognized. A good land tenure system will: (1) Guarantee security and stability to farm families, rural neighborhoods and communities; (2) it will place responsibility for the management of farm operation on the resident farmer; (3) it will provide for a just and democratic system of sharing income from the land; (4) it will return to the community that part of the land income which has been created by the community; (5) it will provide for an efficient and flexible system of distributing land rights from generation to generation, and with due regard to the capacities and needs of farming people; (6) it will encourage a soil conserving and efficient type of farming, and, (7) finally, it will protect the weak, the children, the aged, and the handicapped against exploitation by commercial or other selfish interests.

Large scale holdings operated with sharecroppers, peons, or poorly paid wage workers fail to meet the need of man for security and well-being. Absentee ownerships of smaller commercial farms fall far short of the ideals formulated above. The open market system of distributing land, without adequate controls, results in a maldistribution of farm population, poor management of land, increases farm tenancy beyond desirable limits, and places a heavy financial burden on each new generation of farmers.

Other land tenure systems are productive of human welfare and security. A tribal village system of land tenure may be most suitable for certain native African peoples. Collective farming, many believe, provides maximum human welfare and security for Russian peasants. Family farm ownership with legislative safeguards against foreclosure, absenteeism, the fluctuation in land values may be best in America, and a system of well regulated tenancy may work well in England. Whatever the system, it must be set up and supervised so that the rights of the family farmer, farm wage workers, and minority groups are protected. It must be recognized that the real ownership of land rests with society or the state, that is, the people; and that the right to occupy and to use land is the essential element in land tenure, and it is with the distribution and stabilization of these rights that we are most concerned.

E. The Rural Family and the Community

The rural family is the most effective unit for the permanent utilization and conservation of the land. It is also a basic unit for human welfare and the preservation of cultural values. Finally, the rural family is the matrix of Christian teachings and the best medium for their development into a "way of life."

The rural family achieves its highest form of expression in the "larger family," or the community. The welfare of one is the concern of the other. Obviously the reciprocal values derived from each need protection by defining the relationships and responsibilities existing between the rural family and the community. Certainly, significant contributions by the family

long been a major problem of our civilization. The appalling waste incident to the waging of total war is most certainly accentuating this problem. Agricultural lands have been depleted at an alarming rate and the waste of mineral and timber resources is no less ominous. Improvements in technological processes have, up to the present, effected greater saving than have the efforts of conservationists, but even with respect to mineral resources advanced technological knowledge has not been adequately utilized.

The fullest outpouring of international good-will, the greatest measure of altruism, and the most perfect organization and machinery for relief and rehabilitation will be effectively limited by soilless land and resourceless nature. The abundant life is but a mocking phrase if it has to be won from gullied fields and eroded lands.

Involved in the putting away of childish things and becoming adult is the process of learning to appreciate the value of one's possessions. Especially have the peoples of the newly settled areas of the world, including America, acted like spoiled children who break their toys while shouting with glee. In the childhood of nations much of this can be forgiven. But with maturity we must understand that to play with the resources of the nation is to play with the nation's life and with the lives of other nations.

Somewhere deep in the notion of conservation, wherever it takes form, is the idea that the resources of the whole world belong to the people of the world and to the unborn children of all men everywhere.

C. Production and Distribution

Vice-President Wallace is credited with saying: "Modern science, which is a by-product and an essential part of the people's revolution, has made it technologically possible to see that all the people of the world get enough to eat." Yet, too little has been done in the development of a system of distribution of the abundance of the earth. As long as there are hungry or needy people in the world, restriction of production in both industry and agriculture is abhorrent to the Christian ethic.

Freedom from want is not likely to be realized until production and consumption are coordinated nationally and internationally. Free trade and protectionism alike have failed miserably in distributing the benefits of modern technology in industry and agriculture. Our progress in social and spiritual matters has not kept pace with our scientific progress. Unless this lag in social progress can be eliminated, wars and bloody revolutions will continue to plague the earth.

Dr. Bjarne Braatoy, in his address to this conference, has shown the need for and the value of international machinery for the coordination of production and the orderly marketing of agricultural commodities. His conviction, that workable mechanisms for coordination of production and consumption have already gone beyond the experimental stage, is most reassuring. To quote, "It has been proved that human ingenuity can find the way to a mechanism of stability in the relations between national economies." If this is true then the Christian dream of world-wide brotherhood will begin to materialize. Organized Christianity may well place its influence behind the development of international mechanisms for the coordination of production and trade.

The coordination of production and consumption will help to resolve the conflicts and misunderstandings between the industrial worker and the farm-

the welfare of those who live on the land. It should be strong enough to undertake independent investigations and to publish and circulate its reports. It should serve as an international clearing house for information concerning land and human welfare.

With such an agency carrying on a vigorous program, the planning of a just and democratic social order would be greatly facilitated; the causes of rural poverty could be attacked and dealt with on a world-wide basis, and competition for agricultural resources and markets eliminated as a cause of war.

II. In meeting its responsibility to teach and exemplify the Christian principles regarding land and human welfare the Church will strengthen and rely largely upon the following agencies.

A. The Rural Church in the United States

If land is to perform its sacred function effectively it must be owned and operated by people who understand and apply the Christian principles regarding it.

These churches are strategically situated to teach the stewardship of land; that ownership is a sacred privilege but is never to be used without regard to the common good; that it is sinful to exploit land or to allow it to disintegrate and waste; that the proper use of land for the benefit of both the producer and the consumer may become an important religious service to God and man.

Seminaries and other training agencies should provide special courses and practical experiences for rural ministers and their wives which would help them more thoroughly to identify themselves with the ways, economy and amenities of rural life. Rural ministers should be encouraged to remain on the same field as long as their ministry is effective. They should have adequate support, by the local churches wherever possible. The successful rural ministers should be accorded honor and recognition equal to those who serve in other areas of the Church. More intelligent effort must be made to secure and train lay workers who will be active in religious education, evangelism, home visitation and worship.

B. Agricultural Missions

The high human values associated with land are not limited by geographical and political boundaries. They apply universally. A look at the world as a whole shows clearly that poverty, ignorance, ill-health, due in large measure to undernourishment, civic disability and cultural lag, are most widespread among the rural populations. Rural slums are the abode of many hundreds of millions of people who live on the land. Down through the ages, over wide areas of the world, the tillage of the soil, through force of circumstances or ignorance, have destroyed the land which their own as well as the national well-being depended. In many lands the sins of the fathers in the ruinous use of the land in past centuries are today causing untold suffering in terms of floods, famines, pestilence and poverty.

Only in the wise use of our land resources can civilization be assured freedom from want. The hopes, aspirations and prayers of the majority of the human family for higher standards of living depend primarily on the right use of the land.

Agricultural missions is a valid aspect of world Christianity. The teachings of Jesus cannot be adequately presented without including it in any program that is devoted to more abundant living for rural people. It involves not only technical problems of agricultural production, distribution and finance, if these are not being met by other agencies, but an interpretation of those spiritual and religious values which inhere in the processes of agriculture and the relationship of rural life. It is concerned with laying the foundations for a Christian rural civilization based on a just division of the land, a world-wide cooperative agriculture, and a righteous regard for the rights and privileges with which all men are inalienably endowed as sons of God.